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The Gaza War and Beyond

By Rohan Gunaratna

SYNOPSIS

In today's interconnected world, catastrophic terrorist attacks, whether using conventional or unconventional means, have global implications. After Al Qaeda attacked America's landmark targets on 11 September 2002, US-led forces occupied Afghanistan and Iraq. Similarly, after Hamas-led Palestinian threat entities attacked Israel on 7 October 2023, Israel started to fight a multi-front war that is likely to widen beyond the Middle East.

COMMENTARY

It has been a year since Hamas and its associated groups launched an unexpected attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. The media reported that 6,000 terrorists and their civilian supporters attacked multiple military bases and populated areas in Israel.^x

Thousands of civilians, soldiers and terrorists died or got wounded in the initial assault, subsequent counter-offensive, and ensuing war. Close to 100 hostages remain in Hamas captivity. The Gaza Strip, with a pre-war population of two million, has been destroyed.

The vanguard of the 7 October attacks came from *Al-Nukhba*, a special forces unit of the [Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades](#), the military wing of the Islamic Resistance Movement, abbreviated [Hamas](#). The Nukhba force followed the template of the *al-Hajj Radwan* force, the special unit of Hezbollah named in honour of Imad [Fayez Mughniyeh](#), aka Radwan.

The Radwan force was raised to infiltrate the territory of Israel, specifically to target Galilee and northern Israel. As such, Israel's response to the Hamas attack will not only be to dismantle Palestinian but also Lebanese threat entities and to establish deterrence against their patron, Iran.

The Context

The timing of the 7 October 2023 attack was to disrupt the Abrahamic Accords, a series of bilateral agreements to normalise relations between Israel and the Muslim world. Rather than focus on the lethal military option, Israel should have created three parallel tracks – first, to establish the basis for a two-state political solution to the Israel-Palestine problem; second, to fight Palestinian and other threat entities; and third, to normalise its relations with the Arab and the Muslim world.

Since 7 October, in pursuing the single-track military option, Israel has been waging a war for survival on seven fronts:

- 1) In Gaza, against Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, and other threat entities;
- 2) In Lebanon, against Hezbollah;
- 3) In Yemen, against Ansarullah;
- 4) In Syria, against the Islamic Resistance Front;
- 5) In Iraq, against the Islamic Resistance Front;
- 6) In Iran, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps;
- 7) In the West Bank, against Palestinian threat entities.

These fronts are vastly different, but they have one thing in common. Israel's antagonists are all proxies of Iran and are supported by Iran's military and intelligence community. By arming, training, financing, and directing its proxies, Iran seeks to annihilate Israel. This is the well-known public goal of Tehran.

Despite international efforts to de-escalate the conflict, the threat has grown. With Hamas unwilling to release the remaining hostages and both sides not easing off the hostility, the theatre of war in the Middle East is widening.

The Future

According to the Hamas-run Ministry of Health, almost 42,000 people have been killed, and nearly 98,000 have been injured in Gaza as of 3 October 2024. In every conflict zone, from Afghanistan to Iraq, Syria to Libya, and now Gaza and Lebanon, the fighting produces significant numbers of civilian deaths and injuries.

The global community is putting pressure on international organisations to investigate charges of genocide. Although terrorists are known for using human shields, political and military leaders will also be held accountable for civilian fatalities and casualties.

Israel won its wars against the Arabs in 1948, 1956 and 1967. Can it prevail in this current war? While Iran is regarded as the regional power in the Middle East, Israel is seen as the mini superpower. The way Israel crippled Hamas and Hezbollah and dented Ansarullah, will it be able to fight Iran and the Iran-backed Shi'ite militias in Syria and the Popular Mobilisation Forces in Iraq? Unless there is a resolution to the conflict, Israel is likely to mount a devastating strike on Iran, degrading its economy, decapitating its leadership, and perhaps even destroying its nuclear infrastructure.

Today's Middle East is in an early phase of a regional conflagration. If Israel targets

Iran's oil and gas infrastructure, is Iran likely to attack the energy infrastructure of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates? Will it also respond by closing the Straits of Hormuz and disrupting the flow of one-fifth of the oil and gas consumed by the world?

The war in the Levant will likely spread to the Gulf, and the threat will spread beyond the Middle East. To advance their respective interests, both global and regional players will be involved.

The Next Task

The international community should work with Israel and the Muslim world to establish a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine problem. They should bring to justice the perpetrators that staged the attacks of 7 October and those that caused the ensuing death and destruction in Gaza.

Catastrophic terrorist attacks have far-reaching consequences, in this case, as were the attacks of 9/11, which triggered responses that killed over half a million people in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq and dislocated millions more. The international community must not acquiesce in such warfare and massive losses of lives and upheavals of civilian populations. It should also take immediate action to dismantle terrorist entities that engage in mass fatality and mass casualty attacks.

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